



The Road Not Taken
A Journal of Formal Poetry

Spring, 2026

The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry

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Poet's Corner

Greetings all! I'm Daniel Kemper, an underground innovator of form with a couple of master's degrees and key publications and whatnot. I'm thrilled to be Guest Editor for "The Road Not Taken," and to write this edition of Poet's Corner. We had far, far more submissions than has been typical in the past and the vast scope of voice and ear expressed in all submitted poems, accepted for publication or not, inspired me to offer prospective contributors some tips for writing metrical poetry. This is a little different angle for Poet's Corner, this time around, but let's just dive in!

Problematic lines are ... problematic. If you struggle, your reader will too. Be brave. Trust your creativity. Rip up and rewrite whole lines or passages if needed to make everything smooth.

Test-read. Test read a poem with different beats to learn its music, then let it speak for itself. It can take while to learn how to play/sing a song.

Dictionaries for doubts. Use a dictionary (one with simplified phonetics; e.g., ahdictionary.com) to get a reliably recognized pronunciation/meter. Master this before working with local dialects.

Spare single syllable words. They might be either high- or low-stress in use. Too many make muddy meter. Here are some "80% rules" to help.

1. Long vowels are high-stress; short vowels are low-stress. Depends hugely on usage in the full line. (See below.)

2. Prepositions always scan the way you want, usually just barely but reliably, when read in good "poetic voice."

3. Established an unambiguous beat before using several one-syllable words in a row. Generally, you'll keep the beat clean that way.

4. Review your poem after completing a draft: Replace long strings of one-syllable words with multi-syllable words where possible.

Rule of three. When three syllables with the same kind of stress come together, the middle syllable always takes the opposite stress of the outer two syllables.

Belt management. Draft poems with lines one foot shorter than the final draft will have. When revising, loosen its belt to the desired length, so content sacrifices won't be needed to fix the beat.

Flow finds form. Write in a flow until you feel the energy settles completing the first draft. Then fit your poem to a fixed form.

Irony

Paul Burgess

Originally from Hilton Head Island, SC, Paul Burgess now lives in Lexington, KY, where he works as a private teacher, translator, and interpreter of English, Japanese, and Spanish. He has recently contributed work to *The Road Not Taken*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Light*, *The Orchards*, *Snakeskin*, *Pulsebeat*, and several other publications.

Machine Learning

The language teacher, call him Mister Knight, consults with *Aiko Plus* to save some time. His helpful bot suggests the children write a piece of verse to nurture love of rhyme.

The children bask in Teacher's ardent praise about the way their writing skill's progressed: "You've grown so much in only seven days. Of course, I'm truly thrilled, beyond impressed."

Though Knight's a busy man, he's skimmed a part or two of verse his favorite kids have penned and hears the rest are masterworks of art according to his artificial friend, who's read the work and seemingly enjoyed the rhymes composed by bots the kids employed.

Lisa Barnett

Lisa Barnett's poems have appeared in *The Hudson Review*, *Measure*, *New Verse Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, the anthologies *Sonnets: 150 Contemporary Sonnets*, and elsewhere. She is the author of two chapbooks: *The Peacock Room* (Somers Rocks Press) and *Love Recidivus* (Finishing Line Press).

Subway Prayers

“All ye uncircumcised, ye unbelievers,
come, repent,” the subway preacher whines.
His bible thumped, he moves along to grieve
other born sinners further down the line.
Our own specific and elaborate dooms
announced, we wait like lambs for subway doors
to open up, wide as the gates of hell,
ushering us to final destinations.

Give us this day our daily drear commute,
and save us from our fellows' depredations
as now we go to work or lecture hall
along this dark and subterranean route,
where prayers are said and sometimes even heard,
though every word be muted, mumbled, slurred.

David Lee

David Anson Lee was born on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota and now lives in Texas. He is a physician, philosopher, and poet whose work explores the intersections of identity, memory, environment, and the human condition. His poetry has appeared in *Right Hand Pointing*, *Unbroken Journal*, *The Scarred Tree*, *Braided Way*, *Eunoia Review*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Silver Birch Press*, *In Parentheses*, *The Orchards*, *Spillwords.com*, *50-Word Story*, *Poetry Pea*, *Mouthful of Salt*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Rat Bag Literary*, and many others.

Sonnet for the synthetic tree

they planted glass and copper where oaks stood:
a latticed green without a root or ring,
an imitation of the patient wood
that once lent summer shade to everything.
this craftsmanship of carbon, feather-thin,
keeps vigil with a tireless, humming breath;
it never folds in grief for what has been,
nor learns the quiet lexicon of death.
yet children gather, counting lights as stars,
pressing their open palms against the glow
to feel the subtle tremor under cars:
a promise made to look like what we know.
if grief is private, let the circuit keep:
we gild our losses when we can't afford to weep.

Sabyasachi Roy

Sabyasachi Roy is the author of *Writing While the World Burns* and *Micro Craft for Sentences that Sing*, e-books on the craft of writing. His poems have appeared in *Stand*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Wise Owl*, and others. He writes craft essays regularly for *Authors Publish*.

Frostbite

We froze the letters, salted bone,
as if regret were food to keep.
The satellites blinked monotone,
their Morse as cranky as cheap sleep.
Inside the vault, the air was thin;
a clerk misfiled my pulse one day.
Rawls would've laughed at such a sin—
fairness? sure, but not my way.
The deer outside ate winter's face
while time smoked cheap and paced the hall.
I shelved my shame in labeled case
and prayed the folder wouldn't fall.
A sibling left, the wrong one gone;
the snow outside wrote cryptic quotes.
I swear I heard our old bygone
complain through half-remembered notes.
The archive hums. It knows I'm late.
It knows my hands still shake with sleet.
A clerk stamps sorry as my fate;
I sign, and feel my tongue retreat.

Marshall Begel

Marshall Begel became a serious poetry hobbyist when he found that bad jokes are better received when stretched out with meter and rhyme. He lives in Madison, Wisconsin and has had many pieces in the journals *Light* and *Lighten Up Online*.

Affection Deficit

(After "I Come Home Wanting To Touch Everyone" by Stephen Dunn)

I come home, looking forward to affection.
Our hapless dog expects a belly rub.
It seems she found our bin for trash collection—
I probably should take her to the tub.

My wife leans in and puckers for a kiss,
but then I catch a whiff of something vicious.
I feign a cough to purposefully miss—
I'm sure her garlic curry was delicious.

The cat approaches, eager for a treat.
I should have been more mindful and demurred.
he promptly drops a present at my feet—
three quarters of a fallen baby bird.

At dinner, we'll enjoy our coexistence—
although tonight, I think I'll keep my distance.

Len Krisak

Len Krisak's most recent books are *Magpie* and a translation of Dante's *Inferno*. A recipient of the Robert Frost and Richard Wilbur awards, he has appeared in the *Hudson*, *Sewanee*, and *Southwest* reviews. He is also a four-time champion on *Jeopardy!*

Obsequies

Ill-met by old-moon light, he scraped the blade
Against your throat. You never were afraid,
You told me, almost thirty-five years after.
You said you knew he'd never use that knife,
And were confirmed by how his nervous laughter
Slashed through the muggy night air. Such was life,
Back then and there, on Philly's sweltering streets,
When summer lightning lit the world in sheets.
You said you knew, that night, you wouldn't die.
But if that's true, my darling, why am I
Today one of these few who've come to view
The proof that what you said was never true.

Bill Richardson

Bill Richardson is emeritus professor in Spanish at the University of Galway. His poems have been published in numerous poetry magazines, including THINK, *Causeway-Cabhsair*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *Orbis*, *The High Window*, *Skylight 47*, *Gyroscope Review* and *Crannóg*. Poems of his have been longlisted in several competitions and have been finalists in the *Fish Poetry Prize* competition, the *Write By The Sea* competition and the *An Post Irish Book Awards Poetry Section*

Leaves, Fallen

The ticking hand leaves space behind,
a void that follows every action:
words I wanted to make sense,
moves I made to get reactions.

All that lasted just a moment,
gestures that would not endure,
leaves that shrank and, falling, faded –
a greenness I could not secure.

Years of rotting leaves lie dormant,
softly form a spongy trail,
a living path that's firm but yielding:
what it means I still can't tell.

The past's elapsed, but never ended;
its shadow haunts us till we're gone.
Fallen leaves are with us always
until time has moved us on.

Lazarus Trubman

As a college professor, Lazarus Trubman taught Romance languages and European Literature for twenty-three years. In 2017 he retired to devote his time to writing. His works had appeared in print and online publications, among them *The Threepenny Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Griffith Review*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Rattle*, *Ex-Puritan*, and others.

Love in a Small Town

In a city, which believes not in tears,
there is a woman – she believes not in tears;
she measures you over with a quiet gaze;
you fell in love – you pay the price.
That woman looks only into the past:
it had shattered her wings,
she has been spared but little,
therefore she'll never spare you.
This woman cannot simply live.
She's thoughtful like a moonbeam.
You, casual, wayward passer-by,
what do you have to offer her?
You fell in love – you pay the price;
she looks you over with a quiet gaze,
but at night, she cries bitter tears
in a city, which believes not in tears.

Bridging Gaps

Sabyasachi Roy

LED Skies

At dusk the homes switch on like tired eyes,
and someone's hedge pretends it's winning prizes.

My neighbor trims his lawn as if it's news;
the mower coughs, then files a list of clues.

The puddle holds a counterfeit of space—
a moon rehearsing lines it can't replace.

A glass-wolf silhouette patrols the street,
its paws click patterns Butler'd call a beat—

“we act,” she'd say, “the roles we're told to play,”
and damn, the wolf performs suburban gray.

I've watched it sniff the mailbox like a ruse,
then howl at nothing (same as me most Tues).

The night feels scripted, rhymed by faulty clocks;
my porch light blinks like socks lost at the docks.

Last week I swore that wolf mouthed: get a grip,
though maybe that was me mid midlife slip.

Still, every evening, under LED,
the wolf rehearses being partly me.

Lavinia Kumar

Lavinia Kumar's latest prose book is of 100 women: *Spirited American Women: Early Writers, Artists, & Activists*. She's published 3 poetry books & 4 chapbooks. Poems and flash fiction appear in a variety of poetry journals, & 3 anthologies. She's received four Pushcart and one Best of the Net nominations.

Message To My Mother in the Otherworld

I see it was to Kerry you escaped,
impatient, from the demanding aunts.
I found a postcard you long ago saved
of row boats on the edge of Lough Currane.
You may have thought of the bard Amergin,
his, *I am wind that blows upon the sea...*
But I think you just painted mountains,
yearning for your love, yearning to plunge deep
into the unbound, that you'd sail away
far down the River Lee, to be with him,
that your life of books and art would be gay –
a writing, painting, life of artistic whim –
my careful rational mother, those days
of romance before I knew you. Those days....

Joshua Coben

Joshua Coben is the author of two books of poetry, *Maker of Shadows* (Texas Review Press, 2010), winner of the X. J. Kennedy Poetry Prize, and *Night Chaser* (David Robert Books, 2020), a finalist for the Vassar Miller Prize, the New American Poetry Prize, and the Donald Justice Poetry Prize. A St. Louis native, he lives with his family near Boston and works as an elementary school teacher and librarian. Visit him at joshuacoben.com.

Subway Car

I swear that guy who's standing by the door
is on those cops-and-lawyers TV shows.
Cheap shades, chin fuzz, cap backwards, ratty shoes—
no, can't be him, he wouldn't be down here,
stuck on this sweaty train. It's just us schlubs
commuting home, us kids sprung late from school,
us swaying moms with strollers in the aisle
who get no seat, us girls a rider rubs
his thigh against while fingering his phone,
us drunks and suits and texting teens all thumbs,
the lip-ringed, earbudded dude who taps and hums,
old men with grocery bags, women with brown
or pale spring shoulders seeking summer sun,
and the quiet guy observing everyone.

B.A. Brittingham

Born and raised in the grittiness of New York City, B.A. Brittingham spent a large segment of her adult years in the blue skies and humidity of South Florida. Today she resides along the magnificent (and sometimes tumultuous) shores of Lake Michigan where she is a novelist, essayist, and poet.

In the Wrong Time

Lately, I rise up early in the day
For no more reason than to sit and see
You sleeping with your hair in disarray
And your lashes like wisps of ebony
Against the summer tan upon your cheeks.
And when I bend to gently kiss your face,
There is the scent of sun and wind that speaks
Of innocence — some bright and far-off place
That's never seen by mortals such as I.
It is then that I know the hurt must come.
No finite speck will ever satisfy
Your hunger. In the end you will succumb
 And follow strains of music that passed near,
 But only you were privileged to hear.

B.A. Brittingham

Last Breath

Persistent voices, speeches come to her
Echo-phrases mouthed many years ago
Unite with those of yesterday to blur
This moment's words from those she used to know:
"Go, Dan, and wash your hands before we eat;"
"Please take me home, I need to touch and see
My children;" ... picnics ... mem'ries bittersweet
Soft sun, fall leaves, first love ... "How long has she?"
He asks nearby. With sudden harmony
Their senses mate in final ecstasy
And telescope today's reality
Beyond the past, into eternity.
 It comes to douse the pain, to grant release:
 Grievers name it Death, Diers call it Peace.

Julia Denton

Julia Denton grew up in Atlanta, Georgia and now lives in northern Virginia. She is a retired librarian and part time caregiver for her younger son, age 40, who has lifelong disabilities. She recently completed her Diploma in Creative Writing at Oxford University. Her poems are published or forthcoming in *One Art*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and *Anthophile*.

Slipstream

All these are blanks, he said. *Just fill in where you want to go*. Blank passes, leading me to worlds that I could choose, my path through clouds to islands, cities, homes of distant friends.

Sometimes the person seated next to me would note my eyes fixed on the sunlit sky and ask, *Is this the first time you have flown?* and I would smile and shake my head and think

I could not count the times. *My father works up here*. I grew up trusting wings, first his, then mine. My world was large enough to be exotic yet familiar, ever new
I lived my youth as one long holiday.

And now a half a century away
I sit hemmed in by age, bereaved, alone
the doors keep closing, and what was is gone
and only aerobatics set me free

as from the sky my Daddy calls to me
Just fill in where you want to go. He banks the plane to give a better view of what lies far below, a distant memory.

Adam Short

A.L. Short is an American author whose fiction explores the darker edges of humanity, faith, and power. A native of West Virginia, Short draws inspiration from quiet places and stormy skies, shaping worlds that linger long after the final page.

Ruined

I was a map of unmarked roads before,
Content with the dust of hollow miles,
But now your shadow devours the horizon,
A fever dream that sets my blood to boil.
They come to me, those phantom others,
Pale as death, cold as smoke.
But I am yours, a beggar clawing at your gate,
Drowning in the ruin of what I was.
I ache for the storm of you alone,
The way your eyes incinerate the stars.
No mercy for this exquisite agony,
No salvation but the burn of your scars.
I want to taste the danger on your tongue,
Feel your fingers write my name in bruises,
Let you shatter every bone I own
Until there's nothing left but what you choose.
Take me apart with those devastating hands,
Wreck me with the violence of your mouth,
I am ravenous, starving, on my knees,
Begging for the beautiful way you drown me out.
The hunger that screams your name to the void,
A lover's curse that splits my skin.
You've broken me open, spilled me raw,
And in that shattering, you crawled within.
Only you, always you, my violent religion,
My sweet destruction, my soul's collision.
Ruin me again. Ruin me completely.
I am yours in every desecration, every vision.

Sarah Reardon

Sarah Reardon lives in Maryland with her family. Her writing has been published in outlets such as *First Things*, *National Review*, and *Plough*. Her first collection of poetry, *Home Songs*, was published by Wipf and Stock in 2025.

Suburban Penelope

The dogs are barking mad my husband's home.
The afternoon has stretched on into night.
A silhouette beneath the polychrome,
Returning like a swath of salty foam
To grace the sand a second, soft and white.
The dogs are barking mad my husband's home
Has turned, despite my loom, my skillful comb,
Into a single ceaseless rowdy fight,
A silhouette. Beneath the polychrome
And darkening sky we weary ones succumb
To fear that home will never be set right.
The dogs are barking. My husband's mad. Home
Is nothing but a place from which men roam.
Or so I think upon the shadowy sight:
A silhouette beneath the polychrome,
A twisting man, now turned from looming gloam,
Is coming toward the front porch light.
The dogs are barking mad. My husband's home,
Our silhouette beneath the polychrome.

Donald Wheelock

Poetry, a preoccupation for many years, has taken over Donald Wheelock's life after a career of teaching and composing concert music. *The Road Not Taken*, *Sparks of Calliope*, *Able Muse*, *THINK*, *Blue Unicorn*, and many other journals friendly to formal poetry have published his poems. His two full-length books, *It's Hard Enough to Fly* and *With Nothing but a Nod*, have been published by Kelsay Books and David Robert Books, respectively.

Before the Formal Lecture

She had a pretty face, he felt at first,
until a nothing-something that he said
turned what he thought he saw to something worse—
disdain, perhaps, for someone less well bred.

Perhaps he had it wrong—she *had* been smiling,
and what he'd said had not been an offense;
a hint of irony can be beguiling
and give your words “an echo to the sense.”

She nodded once, a sign the chat was done,
since, clearly, he had nothing left to say.
She urged him to the left, a little stunt
that cleared the way for him—for everyone—
to take a seat in back, she at the dais.
Her smile she aimed at someone in the front.

Stuart Jay Silverman

An east coast expatriate retired from college/university teaching, Stuart Jay Silverman has over 700 poems in journals here and abroad. His sixth book of poetry, *MAURO'S HAT*, appeared in 2025. He divides his domestic life, with his wife of 70 years, between Chicago, Illinois, and Hot Springs, Arkansas. Whether formal, free, or experimental, his poetry is an attempt to enter and become part of the experience of another human being.

Much Ado About Nihil

Across the landscape with unsteady step
the last juggernaut staggers on its way.
Well's Time Machine could use a Johnny Depp
To prime the pump and pull up one more day.

The stars are numbered to the furthest sphere
and are less pawns of fate than quantum snot.
A nova sneezes and its nostrils clear,
and dust goes flying with no why or what.

In the pit of the imagination
the poet and the priest still hold out hope
tinged by cries of desperate stridulation
that sway in the wind searching for a trope.

Day dawns each day, and each day ends in night,
the end of which may, possibly, be light.

HOPE

David Lee

The Bridge-maker's Daughter

she learned to lay the rails the way she braided hair,
each iron tongue aligned and true;
the river kept its patient, doubting stare,
and homes clung to the blue.
at dawn she crossed to islands stitched by rust,
with nails and prayers in her palm;
they said the water swallowed what it must,
and she: she kept the calm.
she married once a man who dreamed in maps,
his fingers roaming shore;
he left a note between the weathered gaps:
“the harbor asks for more.”
she built a ladder out of shipboard planks,
and when the tide forgot to speak,
she taught the gulls new words and gave them thanks
for giving what they seek.
at dusk she takes the long way back to home,
hands full of bridge and rope;
in dark between the boats and restless foam
she knots the next one's hope.

Marshall Begel

Crabapple Tree

Raindrops knock the blossom petals,
hundreds break and flutter down—
a gentle snow that swirls, then settles
into sticky scales of brown.

Next, the reddish fruits of goo
bombard the sidewalk like a carpet,
stick to tread lines of my shoe,
and turn my foyer to a tarpit.

Advertised as ornamental
(bringing out my inner crab),
they should warn of excremental
fruits as lovely as a scab.

Why weren't kindred birds imported,
nesting in its canopy—
ones whose diet would have thwarted
litter from this awful tree?

But then, for precious days in May,
A beauty almost worth the pain—
each bud presents its pink bouquet,
until the blossoms meet the rain.

Lisa Barnett

Robins in Winter

Something like hope flutters from branch to branch,
amid the season's grays and browns and blanch
of sky—an advance of robins in the rain.
It's February, and their breasts' red stain
signifies a late reprieve from all
that's dead or dying in this winter stalled
before the spring. Everywhere things return
or promise to, and I can just discern
a shift or change that soon will bring you back,
like weather foretold in an old-time almanac,
or like these faithful robins in the rain,
who, against all odds, come home again.

Les Brookes

Les Brookes lives in Cambridge UK. He writes poetry and fiction, and his work has appeared in *The Interpreter's House*, *ONE ART*, *Eunoia Review*, *Grand Little Things* and anthologies published by Cambridge Writers and Paradise Press. Website: www.lesbrookes.com

Reunion

We should try again. Wipe the early gaffes
from the slate, scrap the tendency to bitch
about the failings, live without the tiffs,
the narks, the angry darts, the words that scratch.

We should lie again. On the river bank
beneath the willows, or on the straw bale
in the barn. Dally all day till we sink
away to that glad time before the fall.

We should fly again. Not to Nice or Rome,
but to that secret place on the heart's map
where the goats graze on a hill beyond time
and the sun-struck ruin lies half asleep.

If this be error, as once it might have seemed,
I never spoke, nor no man ever dreamed.

James B. Nicola

James B. Nicola, frequent contributor, is the author of eight collections of poetry, the latest three being *Fires of Heaven: Poems of Faith and Sense*, *Turns & Twists*, and *Natural Tendencies*. His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience: The Practical Actor's Guide to Live Performance* won a *Choice* magazine award.

The New and the Young

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...*
—William Butler Yeats, from “The Second Coming”

*When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.*
—William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I.1

It's not quite that the centre does not hold:
it's that interior worlds have become
exterior. All is backward, upside-down—
no, downside-up and turvy-toppy. When
the burly-hurly's done the battle's just
begun. And so the glue's not at the core,
but spread out everywhere in abject fear
of Everything; what's more, of Nothingness;
mostly, of Impotence.

And then I hear
some pieces by the young, so-called “creatives,”
not “writers”, barely poets, only just
adults. And I see how they have surpassed
my goal at their age, which was *to survive*—
with reason to wake up and want tomorrow
for *something*, even paltry, that I could
believe in (so, a life in art for me)—
and have replaced it with a world of triumph.

Beth Houston

Beth Houston has taught writing at ten universities and colleges in California and Florida. She has published a couple hundred poems in dozens of literary journals. She edits the *Extreme* formal poetry anthologies. www.bethhouston.com; www.rhizomepress.com

Farmhand Sabbath

Something greater than the temple is here.

— Matt. 12:6

When eaten, bread transmutes to body: Good.
When broken, earth communes with sprouting grain.
Light resurrects shared seed so nature's food
Might translate law transcending worldly gain:
Creation never rests. The worker's toil
Should own the rich priest's consecrated bread.
Eat freely on this Sabbath, lest it spoil.
Please, break law's fast, like David, when he fed
A hunger greater than his temple's host.
Each blessed day, like Robin Hood we'll break
Our bread, seeds' miracle, this holy ghost.
Our sweat yields grain to bake a savior's cake
That feeds the multitude. For all we raise,
This manna, we give sacrifice of praise.

Donald Wheelock

Winter Words

Like sharpening a pencil, writing poems,
grinding wood away to make a point,
the page as blank as snowy fields displaying
silent tracks, this palimpsest of winter
waiting for the wind to fill it in.

Spring urges snow to melt into ideas...
a pause to let it flow and freeze, and flow
and freeze again, before you capture what
it was you thought you had to say.

Liya M. Akoury

Liya M. Akoury is a clinical psychologist writes poetry, speculative fiction, as well as translations of Russian poems. Her work appears in *Rattle*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Exchanges*, *Squircle Line Press*, and *365 tomorrows*. Her vices include lip balm and afternoon coffee. She was born in Saint Petersburg and is currently living in Northampton, MA.

There's a woman in my bed.

There is a woman in my bed.
There is a woman - here.
Bold, enthusiastic, clear...
I turn thirty-five this year,
Shedding clothing, fear, and dread.

There's a woman in my arms,
And a tyrant in my nation.
My home country's legislation
Outlawed same-sex relations,
Citing non-existent harms.

There's a woman in my bed,
And a homophobe inside me.
Though it's growing ever tiny,
Still, I know it won't go quietly,
It won't stop until it's dead.

There's a woman in my arms,
My ancestors would be proud.
I am free. I am allowed.
In their name, I'm breaking out of
Inner concentration camps.

There's a woman - G-d above!
In this bed, I'll build a temple.
Brick by brick, I will assemble
It to be both strong and gentle,
Fueled by fury, full of love.

Martin O'Connor

Martin O'Connor is a poet whose work has previously appeared in *The Road Not Taken* and *Pulsebeat*. For the past twenty-nine years, he has taught high school social studies in his hometown of Wyalusing, Pennsylvania.

Surprise

I realize as I slog the creekside path
I've forgotten why along the way,
and my machete's edge that cuts a swath
through weeds and thorns gets duller by the day.
My cedar canoe would trim by half
the thousand dawns I need to reach the bay.
But that boat was lost forever ago
when a thief paddled off in hushed twilight snow.

I wake well short of the loud rooster's hour
when at nightmares and cold rain I shudder.
All morning long an icy May downpour —
I curse every step, swear not another.
But just up ahead are dripping blue flowers,
a wobbly wet fawn feeding at mother.
I wipe the raindrops away from my eyes
and move along under gray, drizzling skies.

LindaAnn LoSchiavo

Native New Yorker. Poet. Writer. Dramatist. In 2024, LindaAnn LoSchiavo had three poetry collections published across three countries, with two titles earning multiple awards. Her momentum continued into 2025 with two acclaimed new releases: *Cancer Courts My Mother* — winner of the BREW Seal of Excellence and the Voyages of Verses Book Award — and *Vampire Verses* — winner of the Excellence in Literature Award and The Bookish Reader's Pick Award.

Abecedarian: Alabama Abduction

Abductions don't always share the headlines.
Black women get kidnapped — but don't go viral.
Carlee Russell's disappearance blew up,
Destined to cause a social media
Explosion. She carried the weight of it
For days. Falsehood's sticky web dissolved the
Glue of her life, supportive boyfriend dissed,
Humbled when the atomic viral hoax
Implied he was betrayed, insulting him.
Jilted, the only way to play it was
Knocking her actions, bidding her goodbye.
Lying created a low-voiced legend,
Motives aside. Remorseful, she confessed,
Never explaining fully the details,
Omitting where she hid as searchers searched,
Police investigated, parents prayed.
Questions unanswered, curiosity
Redoubled. Readers wanted all the facts.
Speechless she stayed, annoying the sheriff.
This scandal tarnished Carlee, who was fired —
Uncovered as a *thief* — mocked everywhere.
Valid concerns were voiced about crying
Wolf and submitting bogus crime reports.
Extremely irked were those who rushed to help.
Yearly, one-hundred-thousand Black females
Zig towards misfortune. Never stop searching.

Geoffrey Holsclaw

Geoff Holsclaw is an author, poet, and professor based in Michigan. He has published several non-fiction books and is working on a collection based on characters and circumstances in his neighborhood.

What wonder is the somersault?

Not gymnasts in
elusive form,
before a circus
crowd's alarm;
with tangents of
their lines & limbs,
now tumbling through
the air, they swim.

But hill of grass,
where feet are flown,

un
self
consciously
alone.